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ABSTRACT

With an area of 110,540 square miles and a population of less than one million people, Nevada experiences educational problems that are not simply rural but remote--vast distances, geographic barriers, lack of services, untrained personnel, inadequate funding, etc. The Nevada Rural School District Alliance was formed in 1983 to improve the quality of rural/remote education. Goals of the Alliance include facilitating/assisting rural/remote educational research; providing a clearinghouse/depository for Nevada educational research and data; providing technical assistance and/or inservice training to rural districts in curriculum, instruction, staff recruitment/retention, staff development, finance, planning, facilities, special services; serving as a vehicle for rural advocacy; and addressing unique needs of individual school districts. The Alliance has produced important documents: a statistical report of rural school demographic features; a study of classified employee job descriptions and benefits; a list of current Nevada mining operations; baseline data on district revenues, expenditures, enrollments, pupil/teacher ratios, etc. Other Alliance accomplishments include conducting workshops on hiring/firing practices and computer competencies; establishing a job/teacher bank with University of Nevada-Reno which placed over 25 rural/remote teachers in 1984; sponsoring teacher incentive and professional development center grants; offering continuing education courses; and participating in the legislative process. (NEC)

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REMOTE SCHOOLS:
A DILEMMA BEYOND RURAL EDUCATION

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Nevada, with a land mass of 110,540 square miles and a total population of less than one million people, experiences educational problems that are not simply rural but remote -- vast distances, geographic barriers from population centers, lack of services, untrained personnel, inadequate funding, are but a few examples of problems experienced by remote rural districts that do not surface in their urban, suburban, or even rural counterparts.

The state is divided into 17 counties, which are also school districts. The average of 8.3 people per square mile takes into account the metropolitan centers of Las Vegas (Clark County) and Reno (Washoe County). Among the remaining 15 counties (or school districts), four average fewer than two people per square mile, and six average fewer than one person per square mile. In these counties, a small number of people are dispersed over thousands of square miles that contain few organized communities. For example, Nye County is the third largest county in land mass in the United States (18,064 square miles), yet its population density is only 0.85 per square mile. Its communities (with approximate population figures) are: Tonopah (8,300), Pahrump (3,600), Beatty (1,200), Gabbs (900), Round Mountain (500), Amargosa (250), and Duckwater (200). Particularly in the latter five, the population tends not to be entirely clustered but to be dispersed over distance. Moreover, to travel from one of these communities to the others, consecutively, would require a trip of more than 2,300 miles. Therefore, of these seven communities, only Tonopah and Pahrump fall into the category traditionally defined as rural. The remaining organized areas and their schools are characterized by their remote nature.

Among the schools in Nevada's rural/remote counties, 26 are schools in which one, two, or three teachers are responsible for instruction of grades 1 through 8. Two of these 26 schools have three teachers. Three have two teachers. The remaining 21 are one-teacher schools. In these same counties, there are also 16 high schools with enrollments of 100 or less.

Remote schools are as far as 350 miles from a central administrative office. Many students in these areas of low population density spend up to two hours on a school bus, each way.

As noted before, remoteness causes difficulties in operating schools that districts traditionally defined as rural, urban, or suburban do not

experience. Curricula in remote areas are more limited than those in rural areas because of the high costs associated with offering a wide range of services and facilities for an even smaller student population. Whereas Nevada's rural schools can include physical education facilities, shops, and other features, small remote schools can offer little beyond the basic three R's.

The Nevada Rural School District Alliance was formed in 1983 to improve the quality of education available to those in outlying portions of the state. The Alliance represents rural and remote education in all of the 15 counties outside the state's two metropolitan centers. Local school boards have approved the concept, support local membership in the Alliance, and have allocated funds for its startup and maintenance costs. This inter-district organization has provided rural and remote administrators with an open means of communication with one another, as well as a central information center where they can determine how similar districts are dealing with specific problems and questions. Unified efforts by all districts have increased each district's capabilities for providing quality programs.

A superintendent of schools from each region of Nevada sits on the Alliance's Board of Directors, which meets regularly to review and take action on requests from districts and to advance the planning of the Alliance. An Executive Secretary coordinates the program and plans for program funding.

The Nevada Rural School District Alliance has officially been in existence only since September, 1983. During that two-year period, however, the Alliance accomplishments are many and noteworthy. These past accomplishments are listed on the following pages and each will be briefly described as to its content and importance to the Alliance.

PAST ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Demographic Features of Nevada Rural School Districts

A one-page statistical document listing each rural district's population, square miles, population per square mile, largest city, population of largest city, high schools less than 100 students, and number of 1-3 teacher schools in the district. Excellent working statistical document in explaining vast distances, sparse population and unique needs of rural and remote rural areas to legislature, state and federal government personnel, and outside related agencies.

Classified Employee Study

Nevada School District Boards of Trustees have always had information available to them regarding certified employees, but little or no information, on a statewide basis, regarding classified employees. The Classified Employee Study will provide member school districts with much needed information regarding job descriptions, wages, hours, leave time, sick time, etc., and will enable administrators to compare and evaluate their policies with those of neighboring and/or similar districts.

National Productivity Center Workshop (Hiring and Firing)

A workshop for school administrators, sponsored by the Nevada Rural School District Alliance and presented by Dr. Larry Mazin of the National Productivity Center, Tucson, Arizona, was held in May, 1984 at the University of Nevada-Reno (UNR). The workshop focused on hiring and firing policies and practices and 41 administrators from 14 rural and remote rural school districts attended. On a scale of 1 to 5, the participant evaluations averaged 4.9. All of the participants felt the workshop was excellent and very timely. Many participants immediately began to put into practice what they had learned from the workshop.

Nevada Active Mining Operations

A document recently distributed by the Alliance that gives a listing of current mining operations in Nevada. The document, by county, lists the name of the mining operation, location, name and address of contact person, type of mining activity, number of personnel currently employed and,

where available, information regarding future development. This document enables superintendents to better plan for growth and/or decline in student enrollment in their individual district.

Baseline Data Report

A statistical document which establishes baseline data on each of the districts in the Alliance. The Report covers all statistical data requested by the superintendents, including information on the general fund, revenues, expenditures, taxes, enrollments, class sizes, pupil-teacher ratios, teacher recruitment areas, etc. The information in this document enables, for the first time ever, Nevada rural and remote rural school districts to speak from a united front to educational issues before the legislature. The completion and distribution of the Nevada Rural School District Alliance Baseline Data Report alleviated the most pressing need identified by the superintendents.

Job/Teacher Bank

A cooperative project between the Alliance and the University of Nevada-Reno which helps rural school districts fill teacher vacancies for the coming year. School districts send vacancy notices to the Executive Director, who attempts to match College of Education graduates to the existing positions. In addition, the Executive Director gives a presentation to College of Education classes explaining the job opportunities in each district. Since September, 1984 over 25 teachers have been placed in rural districts using this approach and that number is expected to at least double for the 1985-86 school year.

Teacher Incentive Systems Grant

This grant, funded by the United States Office of Education, enabled 20 educators statewide to explore the possibilities of establishing a teacher incentive program for the State of Nevada. The proposal was jointly sponsored by the Alliance and the Research and Educational Planning Center, UNR. The Federal funding enabled 11 percent of the Executive Director's salary to be picked up by the grant, thus freeing Alliance monies to hire a computer programmer to develop the Baseline Data Report. In addition, a document addressing the critical issues of Teacher Incentive

Systems for Nevada was produced and disseminated to superintendents and to the legislature.

Far West Lab Grant

The Alliance, the University, and the State Department of Education all cooperated with the Far West Lab, San Francisco, California in the development of a Federal proposal to help establish and maintain Professional Development Centers in Nevada. If the proposal is funded, professional man-days and monies will be provided to Nevada in order to help Alliance member districts assess the unique educational needs of rural schools as they relate to the development of these Centers.

Computer Workshops

The Nevada State Department of Education and the Alliance cosponsored two statewide workshops for teachers and administrators in the area of computer competencies. Over 50 Nevada educators, all from remote rural districts, participated in this project.

Continuing Education

This cooperative program between the Nevada Rural School District Alliance and the Continuing Education Department of UNR provides for additional curriculum areas in rural and remote rural high schools. Such courses as calculus, computer technology, physics, etc., not currently available, were offered to students in participating rural and remote rural high schools beginning in September, 1985.

Legislative Involvement

The Alliance has been heavily involved in the legislative process since January, 1985. Several superintendents and the Executive Director have either given or prepared testimony for many critical education bills introduced this session. This testimony was given on behalf of the total Alliance membership and no longer represents individual districts as it did in the past. The great majority of the data and information used in testimony is generated from the Alliance Baseline Data Report. In addition, the Alliance has prepared information packets for numerous individual members of the Nevada Legislature. The information is related to the unique educational needs of Nevada's rural and remote rural school districts.

Although each of the past accomplishments of the Nevada Rural School District Alliance is significant and important, there are two other major accomplishments having far greater impact upon providing equal educational opportunities for Nevada's rural and remote rural students. These accomplishments are:

1) The Nevada Rural School District Alliance is recognized by the Nevada Legislature, State Board of Education, State Department of Education, Nevada State School Boards Association, Nevada State Teachers Association, universities, and other related agencies as a visible, viable, and credible organization dedicated to the improvement of educational practices, procedures, and policies in Nevada rural and remote rural school districts.
2) The Nevada Rural School District Alliance provides the vehicle which allows Nevada rural school district superintendents to meet and discuss mutual problems and concerns.

FUTURE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals and objectives of the Nevada Rural School District Alliance are as follows:

1) To facilitate and assist with the implementation of educational research for rural and remote rural school districts;
2) To provide a clearinghouse/depository of educational research and data in Nevada;
3) To provide technical assistance and/or inservice training to rural school districts to include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following:
   a) Curriculum and Instruction
   b) Staff Recruitment and Retention
   c) Staff Development
   d) Finance
   e) Planning
   f) Facilities
   g) Special Service Areas
4) To provide a vehicle for rural advocacy in all forums;
5) To address unique needs of individual school districts.

Specific activities planned by the Alliance for 1985-86 include:

1) Data collection and dissemination update:
   a) Updating of all educational baseline data and information;
   b) Compilation of data as they apply to rural districts;
   c) Dissemination of data to member school districts.
2) Administrative workshops in the areas of:
   a) Clinical supervision (December, 1985);
   b) Networking (October, 1985).
3) Para-professional training -- (have already joined with major Eastern university to field test its products in rural and remote rural Nevada.)
4) J.T.P.A. State Grant -- (provides job training to all eligible secondary students in the rural districts.)
5) Continued involvement in legislative activities.
6) Continued provision of technical assistance to rural and remote rural school districts.

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